

Ryan

November 8, 1958

Dear Francis:

I am enclosing a copy of a letter just written to President Kirk; as you will soon see it has been dissected into two parts. I have mailed the first section to him, but want your advice about the second.

After writing the latter postscript a moment's reflection made it quite evident that I might be meddling in an altogether unwarranted way. Perhaps the wisest course would be to tear it up. But that alternative might be equally irresponsible, if I suppressed my earnest views on a matter of some personal and sentimental importance merely out of convenience. I would not want to be embroiled in questions of local policy that are none of my present business. However, if you can see any constructive purpose to it (and you might be either totally sympathetic or implacably antagonistic to its intent) it seems to me there would be no impropriety in forwarding such observations to Kirk through the channels you would best know. It still might be best to tear it up, and I will be happy to accept your advice (and ask you to do the clasis) if that is what it is.

I did not feel that I should either solicit or accept your advice on part 1, which is only a statement of fact.

As ever,

Joshua Lederberg

not sent to Kirk
no problem.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
MADISON 6

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL GENETICS
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

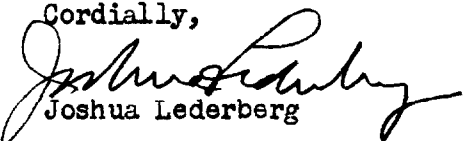
November 8, 1958

Postscript -- to my letter of this date to President Kirk, Columbia University.

Dear Dr. Kirk:

Since writing this letter, I have had some second thoughts about proper courtesies and procedure, and feel it would be totally unfitting to bypass my friends and colleagues. You will therefore receive this communication through the Zoology Department, which is only apt, as you would doubtless have referred it to them in any event.

Cordially,


Joshua Lederberg

Any number of people have justifiably asked me why, in view of my fundamental interest in biological research, I did not immediately aspire to the Ph.D. rather than the M.D. course. I feel you might be interested in my reasons for the bearing they have on the organization of graduate teaching at Columbia University. I should immediately stress, however, that they reflect a personal, and not necessarily competent or well informed outlook of a student as of 14 years ago, and they may be totally irrelevant to the present situation. As I viewed the situation at that time, however: *one important factor was that*

There really was no suitable niche for a student of my own interests in microbiology, biochemistry and genetics. This may be due in part to the separation of the departments as between the Morningside Hts. and P&S campuses which is enough to discourage really satisfactory coordination (from a student's standpoint), but has remained as an argument against duplication of programs. As a consequence, there had never been a congenial and sufficiently broad coverage of general microbiology except possibly as an appendage to Professor Ryan's personal interests, in the Zoology Department. A graduate major in Zoology, or in Medical Bacteriology, would have required an unwarranted distraction to meet the general requirements of these departments, which do not coincide with the special needs of a general microbiologist. To a much lesser extent, the same difficulties applied to concentration in Genetics or in Biochemistry, except insofar as a student's interests might happen to coincide exactly with the Zoology sub-genetics or Medical School sub-biochemistry curricula. Whether Columbia University should have separate departments of microbiology, biochemistry and genetics at its Morningside Hts. campus, or whether other methods of meeting the same needs are available, and the measures that might be needed to improve interchange between the two campuses (from a student's point of interest) it would be impertinent of me to remark upon. I can only recall that 14 years ago something was seriously lacking, and this is all the more incongruous in the light of Columbia's historical preeminence in genetic research. I do hope that these years have seen the evolution of better means to meet the problem.

Perhaps overoptimistically I am looking forward to my now situation at Stanford as an ideal setting for the research and educational programs stemming from my own particular interests. The new medical center (replacing the teaching hospital at San Francisco) is being constructed on the university campus in convenient proximity to the present university buildings. Genetics will be a small but independent department in the medical school, housed in laboratories adjacent to Biochemistry. Microbiology is taught in masterful fashion by Professor van Niel of the Biology Department; infectious disease aspects by the corresponding department in the medical school. The most hopeful feature is the ease that the physical and organizational arrangements will give to effecting the already cordial personal interactions of the staff, and the flexibility and variety of choice available to graduate students.

Needless to say, in unburdening myself of these possibly supererogatory comments I have had Columbia's welfare first to heart, and I have neither consulted nor referred to my friends and colleagues on these questions. These issues touch on many traditions beyond the scope of anyone less than yourself on the Columbia faculty. In particular, I am by no means criticizing any individual for misdirection of policy or administration. I could properly be rebuked with a showing of Columbia's massive accomplishments. On the other hand, I am sure you would welcome an occasional comment with respect to gaps in Columbia's program of a kind you are unlikely to receive except from an loyal alumnus. What I am not prepared to suggest is how to proceed to verify the present authenticity of these criticisms, and to judge the seriousness and reparability of any defects. Perhaps the basic error in my own reasoning is an implicit ~~premise~~ ^{premise} that there is one best approach, and that every large university should meet every specific educational need.

A handwritten signature, possibly reading "J. Z.", is located in the lower right corner of the page.